



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 7, 2013

By Maj. Candis Olmstead

Four Alaska Air Guardsmen to be awarded Bronze Star

CAMP DENALI, Alaska — Four members of the Alaska Air National Guard's 212th Rescue Squadron will be awarded the Bronze Star in a ceremony on Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson today at 2 p.m.

Combat rescue officer, Maj. Matthew Komatsu, and pararescuemen, Chief Master Sgt. Paul Barendregt and Master Sgt. Kyle Minshew, were deployed and assigned to the 46th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron when they responded to an enemy attack on Camp Bastion in Afghanistan the night of Sept. 14, 2012.

Fifteen Taliban insurgents breached base defenses armed with rocket-propelled grenades, assault weapons, and suicide improvised explosive device vests. Without hesitation, and under fire from enemy positions, Komatsu, Barendregt and Minshew entered directly into enemy engagement to help defend the base, coalition troops, provide medical assistance to casualties, and establish critical radio communications with friendly air support. They deconflicted positions to ensure multiple airstrikes were outside the range of coalition troops, ensuring offensive measures against enemy troops and avoiding unintended consequences.

Komatsu, Barendregt and Minshew's heroic actions led to seven lives saved, and protection of garrison forces and materiel assets from further destruction. A fourth pararescueman — who was assigned from another unit to augment their team — will also be awarded the Bronze Star.

The fourth Bronze Star being awarded today on JBER is for Senior Airman Andrew Nichols, a pararescueman who was assigned to the 83rd Expeditionary Rescue Squadron while deployed to Afghanistan. On July 19, 2011, Nichols was launched with a crew to recover a U.S. Soldier who had received critical gunshot wounds. Nichols and his teammate sprinted under live-fire from multiple directions in harsh, steep terrain to the Soldier, and Nichols carried him back to the helicopter under continued enemy fire. He then stabilized the critical patient in-flight. He is credited for saving the Soldier's life.

"Each of these warriors conducted their duties under extreme circumstances to repel the enemy, save lives, and return with honor those who perished," said Maj. Joseph Conroy, commander of the 212 RQS.

The Alaska Air National Guard's 212 RQS is the busiest rescue force in the Department of Defense. While deployed in support of combat operations, they are experts in rescuing or recovering isolated personnel in enemy territory. While at home, they respond to 11th Air Force Rescue Coordination Center requests for emergency assistance when civilian assets are unavailable. As part of a network of agencies, the 212 RQS conducts hundreds of search and rescue missions in Alaska every year and have helped save about two thousand lives.

The Bronze Star Medal is the fourth-highest individual military award in the U.S. military.

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Note: Media interested in attending the award ceremony must call Maj. Candis Olmstead at 428-6030 or 727-1972 to arrange for an escort onto JBER. (We will meet at 1:15 p.m., Boniface Gate.) Copies of award citations will be available following the ceremony.

For additional details of the Camp Bastion attack, please see the article, "Responding to an Insurgent Attack on an Afghan Base," written by Maj. Komatsu and published in The New York Times: [http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/29/responding-to-an-insurgent-attack-on-an-afghan-base/? r=0](http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/29/responding-to-an-insurgent-attack-on-an-afghan-base/?r=0)